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Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 19 March 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit, in the six official languages of the United Nations, the enclosed report on the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS). It is the President's progress report for the years 1994-1997. The second session of the Forum took place in Ottawa, in February 1997, at the invitation of the Canadian Government.

The Forum is a non-institutional arrangement whereby members consider all aspects of the assessment and management of chemical risks within the framework of chapter 19 of Agenda 21.

It would be very useful if this report were distributed as an official document of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, from 7 to 25 April. Canada suggests that the recommendations of the IFCS should be considered within the framework of preparations for the special session of the General Assembly in June 1997.

(Signed) Robert R. FOWLER
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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IFCS

Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety

President's Progress Report 1994-1997

Forum II

Second Session
of the
Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety

Ottawa, Canada
10 - 14 February, 1997

President's Progress Report 1994-1997

Submitted by Canada,
on behalf of the IFSC

PRESIDENT'S PROGRESS REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The INTERGOVERNMENTAL FORUM ON CHEMICAL SAFETY (IFCS or Forum) was established in 1994 in response to a recommendation of United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The Forum is a mechanism for the promotion of the risk assessment of chemicals and their environmentally sound management.

2. The Forum is a non-institutional arrangement whereby representatives of governments, international and intergovernmental organizations, and a wide range of non-governmental organizations, meet to consider all aspects of the assessment and management of chemical risks. There is a strong emphasis on the full and open participation of all partners with the result that the Forum operates by consensus.

3. At its first meeting, the Forum adopted detailed recommendations on priorities of action for the effective implementation of national and international efforts in the six Programme Areas of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21. At its second meeting, in February 1997, the Forum has taken stock of its accomplishments and noted where progress has been slow or non-existent on the recommendations, charting its direction for the next three years.

4. In general, the level of achievement has been most encouraging. The targets for the assessment of chemicals are being met, the global system for the harmonization and classification of chemicals is progressing well, a number of new initiatives are improving information exchange on chemicals, the Forum has had appreciable influence on a number of risk reduction activities and has promoted the development of comprehensive national profiles which strengthen the management capacity of countries. A new international mechanism for co-ordination between international and inter-governmental organizations, the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals, has been established.

5. However, much remains to be done. The commitment of governments to the goals of the Forum has not always been matched by their involvement and support of Forum initiatives. Many countries need to institute a stronger infrastructure to manage effectively their chemical risks. The level of funding by the participants has been less than adequate to provide a Secretariat with long-term support and to ensure the full participation of developing countries.

6. The Forum provides a unique, over-arching mechanism for co-ordinating global action on chemicals. Its non-institutional nature and wide range of participation by all parties give it a remarkable ability to provide answers and assessments to the problems to health and the environment raised by chemicals. It has been well-launched, now it needs for all its participants to follow through on their commitments to pursue the goal of the environmentally sound management of chemicals, particularly as set out in Agenda 21.

The Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS):

Reaffirms the importance of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 and *recommends*, therefore, that United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS):

- *Recognize* that the sound management of chemicals is essential to sustainable development, and that it is a fundamental underpinning of human health, safety and environmental protection and in achieving success in many other chapters of Agenda 21.

- *Recognize* that the IFCS, established in response to the request of governments at United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, has evolved to be the over-arching framework to develop and promote through a consensus building process international strategies and partnerships among national governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations for the sound management of chemicals.

- *Recognize* that governments alone cannot assure the sound management of chemicals. There is a critical role for voluntary industry efforts of responsible care and product stewardship, advocacy and community efforts by labour and public interest non-governmental organizations, and the specialized work of intergovernmental and scientific organizations. The greatest achievements come when all parties work together in partnership.

- *Recognize* that substantial progress has been made through cooperation among partners in achieving the targets in Chapter 19, especially in relation to:

  - identifying the risks to human health and the environment posed by persistent organic pollutants;
  - accelerating the international assessment of the risks of chemicals;
  - implementing the voluntary procedures and in negotiating the legally binding instrument for prior informed consent;
  - developing Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers;
  - moving toward a globally harmonized system for the classification and labelling of chemicals;
  - the promotion of alternatives that reduce the need for using of chemicals (e.g., integrated pest management); and
  - starting to deal with the problems of stocks of obsolete chemicals.

  However, despite substantial progress much remains to be done and will need to continue to be a priority well beyond the year 2000.

- *Recognize* that scientific research will continue to uncover new facts and bring about a better understanding of the effects of chemical substances on human health and the environment. One example is the rapidly growing body of scientific research that indicates that a number of substances have the potential to interfere with normal body functions

governed by the endocrine system. Such emerging issues need to be addressed through research that leads to strategic actions to deal with these risks.

- *Recognize* the leadership role of those governments and organizations that have furthered the work of the Forum by bringing together governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and the support of countries and organizations that have generously contributed by providing assistance to governments in need for their participation. Other countries and organizations are invited to join in promoting the sound management of chemicals through donation of funds or contributions in kind.

- *Recommend* that donors, including multilateral development banks, ensure that development policies, and investments in programs and projects that entail chemicals management include support for the necessary capacity building for developing countries and countries in economic transition to ensure the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

- *Recommend* that national governments take leadership to enhance the efforts of all the partners in finding innovative ways to provide necessary resources for the sound management of chemicals. In particular, this should focus on improving safety, promotion of cleaner technology, adoption of pollution prevention concepts, and capacity building.

PRESIDENT'S PROGRESS REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

7. Chemicals are an essential requirement of modern society but their use can pose appreciable risks to human health and the environment. These risks must be reduced and managed throughout the world in the most cost-effective and sustainable manner. The concept of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS or Forum) arose during the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED); it was refined and developed by a meeting of government-designated experts held in London in 1991. This meeting proposed that an intergovernmental forum on chemical risk assessment and management be established to promote the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

8. The 1992 UNCED reaffirmed this recommendation in Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 which led, in turn, to the first meeting of the Forum in 1994 and the adoption of Terms of Reference and Priorities for Action. The latter are an elaboration and delineation of the six Programme areas of Chapter 19 and provide detailed and achievable targets for national governments and the international community. The key role of governments in achieving these targets was fully recognized and the benefits of regional co-operation in the implementation process stressed.

9. There have been two meetings of the Intersessional Group (ISG) of the Forum, which was developed to provide continuity and direction between the Forum meetings; 1995 in Bruges, 1996 in Canberra. The ISG consists of 31 countries. A number of other countries, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations, have actively participated in the meetings. The second meeting of the Forum took place in Ottawa, February 1997, at the invitation of the Government of Canada.

Purpose and Functions

10. The Forum is a non-institutional arrangement whereby representatives of governments, international and intergovernmental organizations and a wide range of NGOs meet to consider all aspects of the assessment and management of chemical risks. The goal is to seek consensus among these groups to achieve the implementation of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21. The purpose of the Forum is to provide policy guidance and strategies and to achieve improved co-ordination, with a particular emphasis on the regional and sub-regional groups to deal with these issues. The Forum has neither the mandate nor the resources to implement the ensuing recommendations. Ultimately, that is a task for governments and other participants in the Forum.

11. Although the Forum gives particular attention to Chapter 19 of Agenda 21, its remit is much more wide-ranging. All questions concerning chemical risks are within the purview of the Forum. This means that linkages can be explored and developed whether between the six

Programme areas of Chapter 19 or between Chapter 19 and other Agenda 21 issues such as hazardous wastes or human health.

12. The functions of the Forum include the identification of priorities for all aspects of chemical safety, both health and environmental, and to promote co-ordinating mechanisms at the national and international levels. The Priorities for Action, adopted in 1994, identified some 43 specific recommendations, many with target dates, for the realization of the environmentally sound management of chemicals. Governments carry the primary responsibility in implementing these recommendations but there is no question that the close collaboration of international bodies and NGOs is essential to the success of the process.

13. The Forum serves to bring the element of global accountability to bear on all parties in achieving the environmentally sound management of chemicals. By clearly delineating the goals and target dates, the level of achievement by governments, in particular, is made visible and is reinforced if the targets are pragmatic and attainable; such clarity works for the public good.

Strengths of the Forum

14. The non-institutional nature of the Forum and its general and comprehensive Terms of Reference provide a flexibility and adaptability not often found in international organizations. Although voting is formally restricted to governments, in practice the emphasis on full participation of all partners has led to a consensual mode of operation. The transparency of the working procedures and the need for the full participation of all partners has resulted in a unique approach in dealing with global chemical safety issues. The views of all stakeholders are canvassed and heeded. This gives great weight to the conclusions and recommendations made by the Forum.

15. This approach is in complete accord with the basic principle of partnership that was imbued in the spirit of Agenda 21, and particularly developed in Chapter 27. The full recognition of the role of all sectors of society — governments, social partners, industry, scientific organizations, and environmental, public interest and worker groups — in promoting the sound management of chemical risks is an essential element in the Forum's working mechanism.

16. A pragmatic approach in developing the recommendations on a regional basis has led to a number of meetings in the regions so that they can consider all aspects of the issues. This process has been greatly aided by the regional considerations that were evident when the Officers of the Forum and Intersessional Group countries were elected.

II. ACHIEVEMENTS ON PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

17. Analysis of the individual recommendations identified within the Priorities for Action at Forum I in 1994 shows that there has been an encouraging level of success in many areas.

However, this success is by no means uniform either in terms of the Programme Areas or in the particular regions of the world. The following overview focuses on the issues where the Forum has played a major role in initiating the requisite actions. The presence of the Forum has, on occasion, been catalytic in global initiatives on chemical safety.

18. The implementation of the Priorities for Action is, first and foremost, a government responsibility. Yet it has not been easy for the IFCS Secretariat to garner the requisite information from the national bodies; this is clearly an area where improvement is needed. The IFCS Regional Working Groups have been of some assistance in this regard and their role in information-gathering should be strengthened.

19. Although the Forum has, from the outset, recognized the importance of developing linkages to other Agenda 21 issues, it has not focused on this area to date. There is a need to identify those areas or specific activities in chemicals management where linkages exist (e.g., issues affecting human health) and to establish dialogue and co-operation with other fora and organizations in these areas so that joint mutually beneficial efforts may be co-ordinated and progress achieved.

20. A singular international initiative on chemical safety has been the establishment, in 1995, of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC). The Forum continues to have a pivotal role in promoting and supporting this mechanism for co-ordinating the efforts of intergovernmental organizations in the field of chemical safety. The IOMC is a co-operative undertaking among intergovernmental organizations that, within the framework of their own respective constitutional mandates, work together as partners to promote international work. The current Participating Organizations are UNEP, ILO, FAO, WHO, UNIDO and OECD and the process has been initiated to extend membership to UNITAR. Scientific and technical work of the IOMC is carried out through the existing structures of the Participating Organizations, either individually or jointly. Co-ordination of activities with other organizations, institutions, or programmes involved in the area of chemical safety, e.g. Commission of the European Communities, may be carried out within the framework of the IOMC. The IOMC and the Forum have different but interrelated roles and responsibilities, complementing each other in the efforts to develop co-operative and co-ordinated activities at the international level.

21. In the following, the achievements and challenges of the Forum and its partners in the various areas are described.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
Programme Area A: Expanding and Accelerating International Assessment of Chemical Risks	
22. By agreeing on numerical targets for the evaluation of additional chemicals within defined time frames, the IFCS has been able to focus co-operative efforts among national governments, international organizations and industry. To make better use of high quality national evaluations, a new additional type of international assessment document has been developed by the International Programnme on Chemical Safety (IPCS) and efforts are well underway to develop a co-ordinated, step-wise process to address existing chemicals and pesticides with maximum sharing of the burden and maximum output of assessments. Thus far, 119 such assessments have been completed and the prospects for IPCS and OECD to meet the target of 200 assessments by the end of 1997 are good.	23. Assessing 300 additional chemicals by 2000, which is the original goal, will require additional resources and efforts by all concerned.
24. The UNEP/ECETOC Inventory of Critical Reviews on Chemicals has been published in 1996. General criteria for the selection of chemicals were set out at an international consultation.	25. The IFCS will help identify candidates for future risk assessment through its Regional Working Groups.
26. There has been little progress on gaining access to and generating human exposure data or good quality health effects data from developing countries. Several small surveys of national governments to gather information on the types of risk assessment information and documents needed have met with minimal success.	27. More concentrated work is required in this area.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
Programme Area B: Harmonization of Classification and Labelling of Chemicals	
28. The development of a global harmonized system for classification and labelling has progressed well. The Forum has encouraged and sponsored the implementation of this work by the IOMC Co-ordinating Group for the Harmonization of Chemical Classification Systems and this group is working to meet the 1997 and 2000 deadlines. Much of the technical work has been performed by the UNCETDG (physical hazards), OECD (health and environmental hazards), and the ILO (hazard communication). This Programme is a positive example of the synergistic role of the Forum in the international community.	29. In some areas where technical work has not progressed sufficiently, political influence will be required over the next year.
Programme Area C: Information Exchange on Toxic Chemicals and Chemical Risks	
30. When effectively managed, information exchange can provide a sound basis for work in all aspects of chemical safety. This has been promoted by the IFCS through workshops and demonstrations held at ISG2 and Forum II. The IOMC member organizations are publishing an inventory of the considerable information they make available through the Internet, CD/ROM, hard copy and other means. The Global Information Network on Chemicals (GINC), which is an information exchange project using the Internet, has been most successful and is obtaining the co-operation of relevant organizations and countries.	31. More work needs to be done to ensure that information needs of developing countries are being met, including identifying what information is needed and determining the most effective and efficient means of getting the information to those who need it. The latter should pay particular attention to both the exchange of information between and within countries.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
32. The Forum, through discussions at ISG1, has provided general guidance as to how governments could make the current FAO/UNEP voluntary procedure for the Prior Informed Consent (PIC) procedure mandatory. Negotiations should be completed before the end of 1997. Under the current voluntary PIC, 148 countries participate and have designated national authorities; over 60 countries have, thus far, received training in the implementation and operation of the procedure through the FAO/UNEP Joint Programme for the Operation of the PIC, in collaboration with UNITAR.	33. Supporting governments to ensure their capacity to develop or maintain the requisite infrastructure to support the PIC procedure.
Programme Area D: Establishment of Risk Reduction Programmes	
34. The Forum has provided advice on a range of priority risk reduction activities and encouraged co-ordination amongst the partners who are able to carry them out. IOMC member organizations have addressed a number of the Priorities for Action in this programme area, e.g., pesticide risk reduction; accidents prevention, preparedness and response; and prevention of toxic exposure.	35. The main remaining chalienge is to encourage all of the partners (governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations) to organize and implement further measures to reduce risks.
36. The Forum has proven its special role in a highly visible fashion with its work on persistent organic pollutants (POPs). The IFCS developed, with IOMC member organizations, at the request of the UNEP Governing Council, an assessment of 12 specified POPs and provided recommendations on international action including a legally binding international instrument on POPs. Although few resources were available, the Forum was able to meet the UNEP request in little over a year and laid the groundwork for the POPs convention. A more traditional approach would have taken both more time and more money.	37. There is a need for developing sound criteria to identify chemicals beyond the 12 specified POPs that could be included in a global POPs Convention; and to determine if there are chemicals that pose significant risks that are not being addressed under on-going initiatives.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
38. Another area where the Forum has made a considerable impact is in the promotion of Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (PRTRs). Since 1994, through ISG meetings, the IFCS has informed participants on the potential of PRTRs as highly effective and flexible risk management tools that can be adapted to meet the needs for a broad range of countries, including developing countries and countries with economies in transition. There are currently six nations with operational PRTRs. As many as 30 other countries are in the process of establishing PRTRs.	39. To continue to monitor and encourage progress in this area and in particular support public and labour NGO involvement while recognizing the concerns of the chemical industry related to the need to tailor PRTRs to local circumstances.
40. Other areas of priority that have been identified by one or more IFCS Regional Groups for future action by the Forum are:	
41. • The presence of large stockpiles of obsolete chemicals in many developing countries and those with economies in transition is an alarming problem.	42. The IFCS will work with FAO, other IOMC member organizations, and appropriate bilateral and multilateral assistance agencies and multilateral development banks to seek a co-ordinated approach to address this problem, and to discourage further development of new stockpiles.
43. • Forum II has discussed co-operation on research into and exchange of information on endocrine disrupting chemicals and requested the IOMC, through its Participating Organizations, to take further the initial efforts to coordinate activities and identify means of addressing the urgent issues.	44. Forum II decided to review the status of the work at ISG 3 in late 1998.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
45. • Noting the invitation by the UNEP Governing Council at its nineteenth session to the Executive Director, in close collaboration with the IOMC, to develop a report outlining options for enhanced coherence and efficiency among international activities related to chemicals. Forum II requested UNEP and the IOMC to expedite the work to make the report available in the third quarter 1998 to the Forum Standing Committee for review at ISG 3.	46. Generally, working with this type of issue through the IFCS may facilitate consensus before the issues are covered in more formal negotiations.
Programme Area E: Strengthening of National Capabilities and Capacities for Management of Chemicals	
47. The first essential for a government to reduce chemical risks is the legal, regulatory and administrative infrastructure to effectively manage chemicals. IFCS encourages regional co-operation and bilateral assistance as important means of building this infrastructure.	48. Progress has been slow with the great majority of countries still lacking adequate chemical management capacity or the mechanisms for ensuring liaison of all parties involved in chemical safety.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
49. The Forum has actively promoted the development of comprehensive national profiles which assess a country's chemicals management capacity and identify areas needing improvement through an interministerial consultation process as a key first step toward developing necessary capacity. Through a programme established by UNITAR, under the framework of the IOMC, 30 developing countries and countries in transition are receiving support to complete National Profiles by the end of 1997; a number of other countries are also undertaking the development of National Profiles. As an interim measure, a number of countries have developed "mini" profiles focusing on the legislative structure and capacities of countries; one Regional Group, the Expanded Americas, has compiled a Regional Profile based on this information. Regional meetings in Asia and Latin America have been offered in the near future. This is a considerable achievement through the stimulation and support of the Forum.	50. Many countries need to institute a stronger infrastructure to provide an effective management of chemical risks. Their work with the Forum would be greatly aided by well established national focal points and national co-ordinating committees with the power to implement chemical control programmes and the preparation and continuous updating of national profiles. The IFCS will need to take a more active role in promoting and co-ordinating, through its Regional Working Groups, the strengthening of national capacities for chemicals management.
51. The issue of bilateral assistance for chemical management was raised at ISG2 and the results of a survey undertaken by OECD were presented at Forum II. The IOMC is producing a detailed analysis of the capacity building activities of the member organizations and UNITAR. The report will be available in mid-1997. Together, this information should provide a strong foundation to more systematically address capacity building needs.	52. The IFCS mechanism can be used to better identify the technical co-operation needs to countries and facilitate the development of partnership frameworks to match these needs with potential sources of technical and financial resources. Such partnerships will need to include the provision of domestic resources in order to ensure national government commitment.

ACHIEVEMENTS	CHALLENGES
Programme Area F: Prevention of Illegal International Traffic in Toxic and Dangerous Products	53. The development of this issue requires effective chemical control legislation. When this is in place in a sufficient number of countries, the IFCS will evaluate the need for further efforts or measures in this Programme Area.

III. UNRESOLVED ISSUES

54. The Forum has made considerable progress since its establishment in 1994 and its identity and purpose is now widely recognized. There are, however, a number of issues whose resolution would greatly improve its success in achieving the goals of Agenda 21.

55. • The level of financial support to the Forum has not provided the long-term support of the Secretariat that is required. The Secretariat plays an essential role in the Forum achieving the goals of Chapter 19. Sound and consistent funding is essential to the proper working mechanism of the Forum.

56. • The Forum and the international organizations, particularly of the IOMC, have distinct and separate roles and responsibilities. A thorough understanding of these would greatly serve to advance efforts.

57. • Funding for the full participation of developing countries in the work of the Forum has been difficult to obtain. A long-term commitment by the partners in a position to provide assistance would be most beneficial.

58. • Funding for regional efforts has not matched the stated commitment of the Forum members to the importance of regional and sub-regional programmes. To date, Regional Working Groups have not succeeded in delineating regional and sub-regional priorities for technical assistance which is necessary for the development of regional strategies for capacity building and to mobilize resources for these endeavours from potential donors.

IV. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

59. The Forum provides a unique, over-arching, mechanism for co-ordinating global action on chemicals. Its non-institutional nature and the wide range of participation on an equal footing mean that it is well suited to providing answers and assessments for the problems to health and environment raised by chemicals.

60. The mechanisms for the implementation of Forum initiatives and recommendations will need to be refined in the coming years. If adequate resources are made available to the Secretariat, a more business-like and determined approach can be made to ensure that the will of the Forum is adequately expressed by the necessary actions in the world arena. This will lead to the fulfilment of the high hopes of Agenda 21 for the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

61. The Forum has made an auspicious beginning; chemical problems are being solved in a new and imaginative manner. The full participation of all stakeholders bodes well for the future. What is now needed is strengthened commitment by all partners -- government, intergovernmental and non-governmental.

V. PROPOSALS TO UNGASS

The Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety (IFCS):

Reaffirms the importance of Chapter 19 of Agenda 21 and *recommends*, therefore, that United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS):

- *Recognize* that the sound management of chemicals is essential to sustainable development, and that it is a fundamental underpinning of human health, safety and environmental protection and in achieving success in many other chapters of Agenda 21.

- *Recognize* that the IFCS, established in response to the request of governments at United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, has evolved to be the over-arching framework to develop and promote through a consensus building process international strategies and partnerships among national governments, intergovernmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations for the sound management of chemicals.

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  - identifying the risks to human health and the environment posed by persistent organic pollutants;
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  - starting to deal with the problems of stocks of obsolete chemicals.

  However, despite substantial progress much remains to be done and will need to continue to be a priority well beyond the year 2000.

- *Recognize* that scientific research will continue to uncover new facts and bring about a better understanding of the effects of chemical substances on human health and the environment. One example is the rapidly growing body of scientific research that indicates that a number of substances have the potential to interfere with normal body functions governed by the endocrine system. Such emerging issues need to be addressed through research that leads to strategic actions to deal with these risks.

- *Recognize* the leadership role of those governments and organizations that have furthered the work of the Forum by bringing together governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and the support of countries and organizations that have generously contributed by providing assistance to governments in need for their participation. Other countries and organizations are invited to join in promoting the sound management of chemicals through donation of funds or contributions in kind.

- *Recommend* that donors, including multilateral development banks, ensure that development policies, and investments in programs and projects that entail chemicals management include support for the necessary capacity building for developing countries and countries in economic transition to ensure the environmentally sound management of chemicals.

- *Recommend* that national governments take leadership to enhance the efforts of all the partners in finding innovative ways to provide necessary resources for the sound management of chemicals. In particular, this should focus on improving safety, promotion of cleaner technology, adoption of pollution prevention concepts, and capacity building.

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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Contribution of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Commission on Sustainable Development, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/113, the contribution of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The report will also be made available to the General Assembly at its special session.

* E/CN.17/1997/1.

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Annex

CONTRIBUTION ON THE CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES TO THE UNITED NATIONS FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

1. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was adopted in 1992, has received 165 instruments of ratification or accession assuring almost universal membership of States.

2. The Convention was one of the key outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), and its objectives have a close relationship to the goals of sustainable development. It has linkages to the framework of Agenda 21, with relation to energy, transport, industry, agriculture, forests, water and waste management.

3. An important element in the global effort to address climate change and its impacts is the open exchange of information on the implementation of commitments of Parties under the Convention. This also contributes to developing international debate on longer-term trends in consumption and production patterns, in accordance with Agenda 21. National communications are submitted so that Parties inform each other of how they are meeting their commitments under the Convention and describe their climate change programmes and how these programmes will affect greenhouse gas emissions and sinks by the year 2000.

4. In addition, the UNFCCC secretariat is mandated by the Parties to the Convention to prepare a compilation and synthesis of the national communications for consideration by them. A second such compilation and synthesis was submitted to the second session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) in which it considered the national communications of 33 Annex I Parties. The document provides an overview of the implementation of the Convention by reporting Parties, noting trends and patterns, areas of convergence and divergence, data gaps and other appropriate conclusions, including the overall effects of policies and measures. It demonstrated that while Annex I Parties are fulfilling their commitments to the implementation of national policies and measures on the mitigation of climate change, they need to make additional efforts to overcome difficulties that they face in achieving the aim of returning their emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by the year 2000.

5. Another link to furthering the goals of sustainable development is the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), whose Second Assessment Report is considered to be the most comprehensive and authoritative assessment now available of the scientific and technical information regarding global climate change. The IPCC has now initiated steps towards preparation of its Third Assessment Report to develop a better objective scientific understanding of issues related to climate change, its impacts and possible response options. This report is expected to enhance the formulation of climate change policies in the context of sustainable development.

6. New initiatives for cooperative implementation, including technology transfer and diffusion, between all Parties to the Convention and with the major groups in civil society are also being explored by the Parties of the UNFCCC. Through these linkages the key themes of Agenda 21 pertaining to integrated policy development, citizen participation in decision-making, institutional and human capacity-building and global partnerships involving many stakeholders, are being addressed by the UNFCCC.

7. The UNFCCC has also taken first steps to deal with the continued rise of emissions and concentrations of greenhouse gases. The Berlin Mandate agreed by the first Conference of the Parties is the basis for considerable efforts under way in the Ad hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate (AGBM). The COP, at its second session, called, inter alia, for acceleration of negotiations of the text of a protocol, or another legal instrument which would fully encompass the remit of the Berlin Mandate. The General Assembly, at its special session, may wish to encourage Member States to agree on a satisfactory result of these negotiations at the third session of the COP, scheduled to be held in Kyoto in December 1997.

8. Steps are being taken by developing country Parties to prepare their initial communication of information related to implementation. The Global Environment Facility (GEF), as the interim operating entity of the financial mechanism of the Convention, is supporting developing country Parties in implementing their commitments by funding enabling activities such as planning and endogenous capacity-building. The Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) called on the GEF to provide expeditious and timely support to these Parties and initiate work towards a full replenishment in 1997.

9. Further international action in the implementation of Agenda 21 will help to involve the whole international community in promoting the effective implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

10. Noting the relevant provisions of Agenda 21 relating to the transfer of environmentally sound technology, cooperation and capacity-building, the COP at its first and second sessions took decisions related to these issues. The General Assembly may also wish to pay special attention to the transfer of technology.

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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 8 April 1997 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the pleasure to bring to your attention the report of the Ad-Hoc Expert Group Meeting on the Implementation of Special Measures for the Least Developed Countries in Agenda 21, which was held at United Nations Headquarters on 3 and 4 April 1997.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and the accompanying report of the Expert Group circulated as an official document of the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

(Signed) Mohammad ZIAUDDIN
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Coordinator of the LDCs in New York

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Annex

AD-HOC EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIAL MEASURES FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES IN AGENDA 21

UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
New York
3-4 April, 1997

REPORT OF THE AD-HOC EXPERT GROUP MEETING

INTRODUCTION

1. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa and the LDCs (OSCAL) of the UN Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development (DPCSD) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) convened an Ad-Hoc Expert Group Meeting from 3-4 April, 1997 to evaluate the progress made in the implementation of the special measures for LDCs in AGENDA 21 and to make recommendations that would be considered by the Special Session of the General Assembly to review the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Twelve experts from 11 LDCs participated at the meeting. In addition to reviewing progress in the implementation of the special measures for LDCs in Agenda 21, they exchanged views on country-level experiences as regards formulation and implementation of national policies and strategies for sustainable development.

2. A number of experts from the United Nations system, including UNCTAD, UNDP, and the DPCSD, and international experts representing the NGO and academic communities, attended the meeting as resource persons. Representatives of some member countries participated as observers. A list of participants is attached.

3. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Francisco Mabjaia of Mozambique and Mr. Abdul Latif Mondal of Bangladesh served as Vice Chairman-cum-rapporteur. The meeting was opened by Mr. Chandra Patel, Officer-in-Charge of the Office of the Special Coordinator for LDCs in UNCTAD and an opening statement was made by Mr. Emmanuel Goued Njayick, on behalf of the Special Coordinator for Africa and LDCs in DPCSD.

4. The meeting emphasized that Agenda 21 needs to be complemented by more specific policies and measures that would give concrete expression to the special priority it attaches to LDCs. In light of the slow progress in the implementation of special measures in Agenda 21 for LDCs, the meeting recommended national, regional and international actions and external support measures in a number of areas mentioned below, and recommended that the Special Session of the General Assembly should take them into account in formulating measures for LDCs.

NATIONAL POLICIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN LDCs

5. Agenda 21 recommended, inter alia, a series of international, regional and national-level actions by countries to promote economic policies conducive to sustainable development. Most LDCs in recent years have embarked on a wide-ranging policy reform process. In this regard, areas of attention by LDCs have been in line with those highlighted in Agenda 21, and include reducing fiscal and external deficits, improving mobilization and use of domestic resources, enhancing the efficiency of the public sector, trade and exchange liberalization, and providing greater opportunities to the private sector. LDCs have also initiated reforms in such critical areas as population, education, health, and food security. An increasing number of LDCs have also put in place mechanisms to ensure greater popular participation in development.

6. The socio-economic difficulties in LDCs are further aggravated by a specific set of environmental problems, such as land degradation, coastal erosion, drought and desertification,

poor water quality and scarcity, deforestation and endangered natural endowments. These environmental problems are, in turn, affected by certain complex and inter-related factors, including poverty and poverty-related population pressure, cross-border movements of refugees and displaced persons, and natural and man-made disasters.

7. Pursuant to the recommendations of Agenda 21, a large number of LDCs have made attempts to incorporate environmental concerns into their national development policies and strategies. Many have elaborated National Environment Action Plans (NEAPs) and identified key environmental issues facing their countries, as well as specific measures to arrest and reverse environmental degradation and promote sustainable development. A number of NEAPS also set out environmentally desirable policy objectives for major sectors, such as agriculture, industry, health and sanitation, biodiversity, energy, including rural energy. Many LDCs are also undertaking specific actions to cope with urgent environmental problems such as drought, desertification, land degradation, coastal erosion and natural disasters.

8. However, the scope, speed and effectiveness of these measures are constrained by a number of factors, such as inadequate resources, particularly external financial and technical support and external indebtedness; lack of prior experience and institutions dealing with environmental issues; shortage of qualified manpower, appropriate environmentally sound technologies, and domestic research capacity; conflicting objectives and priorities of environmental conservation and economic growth in certain cases; and the overall complexities in understanding and implementing Agenda 21.

9. The Expert Group noted that some LDCs have not adopted national Agenda 21 and encouraged these countries to accelerate the elaboration process, and for the countries which have already done so, to launch the process of elaboration of local Agenda 21 in accordance with conclusions and recommendations of UNCED contained in the Agenda 21. The group also called upon LDCs development partners to support LDCs in the process of elaborating and implementing national and local Agenda 21.

10. The Expert Group expressed concern about the slow progress made in implementing the special measures for LDCs called for in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 and urged all donors and UN bodies to accord high priority to study and find appropriate solutions to the constraints outlined above in paragraph 8. It noted that future policies and actions by both LDCs and their development partners should focus on these constraints and build on the lessons learned from the implementation of existing policies and measures as well as "best practices" in LDCs and elsewhere. On their part, LDCs would need to continue their efforts towards integration of environment considerations in their development policies and strategies, through, inter alia, addressing, in an integrated manner, the intertwined concerns of poverty eradication and improving environmental management; enhancing awareness among local communities in both rural and urban areas, including women, of the benefits of environmental protection; developing human resources as well as institutional and technological capacities to deal with environmental problems as an integral component of overall national capacity building efforts; and providing incentives for improved natural resources management and better energy use.

FINANCING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

11. Bearing in mind the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities stipulated in Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration, the Expert Group expressed serious concern that ODA to LDCs has dropped to 0.07 per cent of the GNP of donor countries, which is in sharp contrast to the commitment of 0.15 per cent made in the Programme of Action for the LDCs. It stressed that FDI cannot be regarded as a substitute for ODA, as the share for LDCs in relation to total flows to developing countries was 1 per cent in 1994 and 1995.

12. While the need for adequate resource transfers were emphasized, it was felt that building national capacities to assist in the assessment of resource requirements for sustainable development in LDCs was required and clear priorities should be established at the national level as regards the use of such resources. Many participants identified priorities such as the provision of fresh water, sewage treatment, combating desertification, and sustainable agricultural and rural development and sustainable forest management. External financial flows could also act as a catalyst for generating resources at the national and regional levels.

13. The Expert Group recommended that:

- donor countries should expeditiously implement their ODA commitment to LDCs as called for by the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries in the 1990s. They should also fulfil their financial commitment made at Rio, and other major UN Conferences and Summits by providing adequate new and additional resources;

- donor countries and multilateral financial institutions should assist LDCs by facilitating the use of ODA as leverage to attract FDI, facilitate trade expansion as well as private flows in the area of environment and development;

- as regards funds and facilities in the area of sustainable development, GEF funding for LDCs should be substantially increased and the Facility should follow Capacity 21's lead and assign an allocative target for funding projects in LDCs. In addition, the procedures to access this Facility should be made flexible for LDCs and donors should simplify aid procedures with the goal of expediting the approval of projects.

14. The Expert Group noted that a number of innovative financial mechanisms are currently under discussion in international fora. The LDCs should be given specific focus in the process of their establishment and disbursement of funds once established.

15. Unsustainable external debt continues to be a drag on the ability of LDCs to fund sustainable development programmes. The Expert Group took note of recent positive developments to address this issue, in particular, the initiative for Highly-Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC), of which 29 of 41 potential beneficiaries are LDCs. However, it called upon multilateral financial institutions to make its implementation more flexible to cover a greater number of LDCs and to confer the benefits expeditiously. The Group also recommended that

the Special Session encourage creditors to streamline procedures to make it easier for LDCs utilize debt-for-environment swaps and donor countries to consider the creation of dedicated environmental funds for sectors and activities in LDCs such as sustainable agriculture, forestry, integration of environment in decision-making, population programmes and strengthening environment-related NGOs.

TRADE AND ENVIRONMENT

16. LDCs are marginalized from the international trading system largely because of problems of market access and supply side constraints. Complex environmental requirements may further exacerbate these constraints. The need to implement special measures, including the possibility of providing duty free or concessional tariffs, to promote market access for products of export interest to LDCs was also recognized. The Expert Group urged the members of the WTO to expedite the implementation of the Plan of Action in favour of LDCs agreed upon by the WTO Ministerial Conference held in Singapore, December 1996.

17. The export to LDCs of hazardous and potentially hazardous products, such as food and drugs sold beyond their expiry dates, was a matter of serious concern. Prior information and building capacity to deal with these products was deemed important. Some noted that WTO should consider special measures to ban such exports. Further studies on the magnitude of the problem, monitoring mechanisms and possible solutions to this problem were required.

18. LDCs frequently lack the means of implementation of national environment policies. It was recognized that while there may be market opportunities for environmentally friendly goods and services for LDCs, such as eco-tourism, technical assistance and infrastructural support, including institutional infrastructure are needed to exploit such opportunities.

19. In the context of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), the need to design and implement positive and supportive measures for LDCs was noted. This may be lacking in particularly in MEAs which were of interest to LDCs. Problems related to desertification were particularly noted in this context. It was also noted that MEAs have, in certain cases, led to the dumping of obsolete products to LDCs (for example CFC using old refrigerators and air conditioners) and measures are needed to mitigate this.

20. In integrating trade, environment, and development, the scope for regional, bilateral and multilateral cooperation should be extended to include technological development and environment-related issues such as monitoring the movement of hazardous wastes and domestically prohibited goods; the establishment or further development of testing and certification bodies; the promotion of eco-friendly raw materials, such as eco-friendly dyes; and the coordination of approaches to FDI, with a view, inter alia, to ensuring access to and transfer of ESTs, and developing national capacities for early warning assessments of the possible local environmental consequences of trade. Existing institutional mechanisms for regional cooperation could be used for this purpose. Many of these areas are technically complex and will require close collaboration at bilateral and multilateral levels with countries and institutions which have

the relevant expertise. In this context, the provision of ESTs and FDI assumes greater importance, particularly in meeting the objectives of MEAs.

21. Experts noted that, with regard to making trade and environment mutually supportive, given the small size of LDCs trade and their supply constraints, it is difficult for them to generate the resources required to sustain "best environmental practices." Participants expressed concern that some countries could use differing environmental standards as trade restrictive measures. The mid-term Global Review of the Implementation of the Programme of Action for LDCs recommended inter-alia that environmental considerations should not be used to constrain LDCs exports. It was also recognized, that with adequate support for commodity diversification programmes, as advocated by the Mid-Term Global Review of the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries in the 1990s in September, 1995 and by the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole of the General Assembly which reviewed the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s (UN-NADAF) in September, 1996, opportunities exist for non-traditional exports from LDCs, including environmentally-friendly products.

22. The Expert Group called on bilateral and multilateral development partners to support the LDCs in the following areas:

- trade liberalization and market access, including safeguarding existing market access conditions, providing additional duty free access, dismantling non-tariff, technical and procedural barriers, and removing supply constraints.

- investment: (a) providing special fiscal and other incentives in both home and host countries to encourage FDI flows as a source of long term capital; and (b) enhancing the role that FDI can play in the advancement of their social and environmental objectives.

- special measures in favour of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs)

- implementation of positive measures to assist LDCs to become Parties to MEAs and to tackle the environmental problems that the MEAs seek to resolve, in keeping with the principle of common but differentiated responsibility.

- information on potentially hazardous wastes and products: assisting capacity building in LDCs, who lack the ability to ensure safe use, owing to inadequate infrastructure for controlling the importation, distribution, storage, and disposal of such goods.

- sustainable tourism: launching a study of the infrastructure requirements for developing sustainable tourism and identification for the possible sources of finance for this activity.

CAPACITY-BUILDING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A) The Transfer of Environmentally Sound Technologies (ESTs)

23. The Expert Group emphasized the issue of building capacity in developing indigenous ESTs and, in this context, a bottom-up approach, which takes account of local needs and constraints, was recommended as the best approach. In addition, the Group pointed to the need for building capacity to improve the absorption and adaptation capacities for ESTs in LDCs. In this regard, it was noted that concrete targets for capacity building should be set up to decrease illiteracy, increase vocational training, as well as institutional capacity, particularly to implement environmental laws, implement environmental management systems, and create an enabling environment. It was also noted that the approval time for funding projects on technology transfer should be reduced.

24. Given the varying priorities of different LDCs, it would be necessary to ensure that only technologies which are appropriate to the social, economic and environmental priorities of LDCs were transferred. Technology needs assessments should translate to concrete investment proposals. Information networks and means of accessing information on ESTs need to be developed. The Group also expressed the view that LDCs should be able acquire patents and publicly funded ESTs for transfer on preferential and non-commercial terms.

25. The Expert Group recommended the following actions in support of LDCs:

- the establishment of a database of endogenous technologies in developed countries and LDCs should be established, to facilitate sharing of information and transfer of related technologies among LDCs and their development partners. This could also cover environment related technologies of interest to LDCs;

- building on existing capacities, a more concerted effort to encourage the use of technology needs assessment as a tool for promoting the transfer of appropriate environmentally sound technologies to LDCs, and strengthen national capacity in technological assessments;

- the establishment of partnership arrangements among LDC governments, donor agencies, and medium, small and micro-enterprises with a view to promoting investment in cleaner production technologies. This could include sharing information on common constraints to the transfer and assimilation of ESTs;

- further efforts by Governments of developed countries, in accordance with Agenda 21, para. 34.18 (iii) and (v), to acquire privately owned technology in order to transfer it on concessional terms to LDCs;

- the examination of possible special measures in favour of LDCs, including establishing special credit lines to promote the diffusion of ESTs to developing countries, in particular LDCs;

- the promotion by developed countries of technology transfer to LDCs in order to assist them in creating a sound and viable technological base, in accordance with Article 66.2 of the Uruguay Round Agreement on trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPs).

- the promotion by governments of developing countries of measures to strengthen South-South cooperation for technology transfer, particularly for labour-intensive technologies, and capacity-building.

B) Training

26. Capacity-building and human resource development play a key role in supporting LDCs in their efforts to achieve sustainable development. In integrating economic and social development and environmental protection, projects and programmes should combine the objectives of poverty eradication, the development of export supply capabilities and improved environmental management. This requires investments in infrastructure and institutional capacity building. Furthermore, projects should be designed and implemented at the grassroots level, in close cooperation with the developmental NGOs working in LDCs, and local institutions and communities in both rural and urban areas.

27. The Expert Group recommended that capacity-building activities could focus on the following areas:

- building institutional capacity to strengthen coordination of policies in the areas of poverty eradication, trade and environmental management. This also involves the promotion of coordination between different Ministries, grassroots organizations and the business community;

- facilitating the effective participation of LDCs in multilateral deliberations and negotiations on trade, environment and development. This may require the organization of briefings; training of officials participating in international deliberations and negotiations on trade and environment; and carrying out special studies.

28. The experts noted that U.N. system organizations are helping LDCs to strengthen their capacity to implement AGENDA 21. However, while many LDCs have received assistance in designing their national plans and have included the views of non-governmental organizations in their design, greater efforts have to be directed towards strengthening the capacity of national and local governments, NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) to implementing sustainable development programmes and projects in a partnership framework. The use of national experts should be promoted in this context.

28. The experts noted that much remains to be done in regards to helping LDCs establish national databases on natural resources, (climate, soil, terrain conditions, water resources, and vegetative cover), including their actual and potential use, and strengthening their national capacities for early warning assessments and analysis.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

29. The Expert Group urged all Governments, organizations, funds and programmes of the United Nations system, including the Bretton Woods Institutions, other concerned international organizations and non-governmental organizations to undertake appropriate follow-up actions to implement the recommendations of the meeting, in particular, and of Agenda 21 in general, with a view to promoting sustainable development in LDCs.

30. Member states of the UN system are urged to take into account the conclusions and recommendations of the meeting in formulating the outcome of the Special Session of the UN General Assembly to held during June 1997. The Secretary General of the United Nations is invited to consider establishing an inter-agency mechanism with a view to facilitating the monitoring of UN system actions in favour of LDCs in the implementation of Agenda 21.

31. The Expert Group decided to request the chairman to present its report to the Fifth session of the CSD to be held in New York on the 7-25 April 1997. The CSD is urged to accord focussed treatment to the LDCs in its future work.

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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 1 April 1997 from the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women to the Chairman of the Commission on Sustainable Development

I have the honour to transmit to you the agreed conclusions on women and the environment adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-first session (see annex).

As you will note, the Commission has entrusted me with the responsibility of transmitting the agreed conclusions through you to the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session, as well as to the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session to review the implementation of Agenda 21.

I would be grateful if arrangements could be made to have these agreed conclusions issued as an official document of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session and of the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session.

(Signed) Sharon BRENNEN-HAYLOCK
Chairperson
Commission on the Status of Women

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Annex

FOLLOW-UP TO THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN: IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND ACTION IN THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN

Agreed conclusions submitted by the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women in the critical area of concern: women and the environment

1. The recently held United Nations conferences and summits, particularly the Fourth World Conference on Women and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, have underlined that the contribution of women to economic development, social development and environmental protection, which are mutually reinforcing components of sustainable development, should be recognized and supported, and that there is need for a clear gender perspective in environmental management. Moreover, unless the contribution of women is recognized and supported, sustainable development will be an elusive goal.

2. In the five-year review and assessment of the results of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, moving beyond the concept of women as a major group, a major focus should be the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into the development and implementation of all legislation, policies and programmes, with a view to achieving gender equality, taking into account the Beijing Platform for Action and the results of other global conferences.

3. In designing and implementing environmental programmes and policies, including those related to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Beijing Platform for Action at the national and local levels, all responsible actors should ensure that a gender perspective is fully integrated into them, through the development and application of analytical tools and methodologies for gender-based analysis. Monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be in place to assess gender mainstreaming and its impact.

4. The Commission on Sustainable Development should mainstream a gender perspective into its future work, ensuring that differential impacts on women and men of policies and programmes for sustainable development are well understood and effectively addressed.

5. All responsible actors are requested to adopt a holistic, coordinated and collaborative approach to integrating a gender perspective into sustainable development, between governmental ministries and departments and, at the international level, between United Nations agencies, funds and bodies and other international entities.

6. All responsible actors should support the active participation of women on an equal footing with men in sustainable development at all levels, including participation in financial and technical decision-making through appropriate legislation and/or administrative regulations.

7. Governments should ensure that policies for the liberalization of trade and investment are complemented by effective social and environmental policies into which a gender perspective is fully integrated, so as to ensure that the benefits of growth are fully shared by all sectors of society and to avoid deterioration of the environment.

8. As consumers, both women and men should be more aware of their ability to behave in an environmentally friendly manner through measures such as eco-labelling, which is understood by consumers regardless of age or level of literacy, and local recycling schemes.

9. Gender-sensitive research on the impact of environmental pollutants and other harmful substances, including the impact on the reproductive health of men and women, should be intensified and linked with the incidence of female cancers. The findings should be widely disseminated, taking into account the results of research on the implementation of national policies and programmes. However, lack of full scientific data should not be a reason for postponing measures that can prevent harm to human health.

10. The active involvement of women at the national and international levels is essential for the development and implementation of policies aimed at promoting and protecting the environmental aspects of human health; in particular, in setting standards for drinking water, since everyone has a right to access to drinking water in quantity and quality equal to his or her basic needs. A gender perspective should be included in water resource management which, inter alia, values and reinforces the important role that women play in acquiring, conserving and using water. Women should be included in decision-making related to waste disposal, improving water and sanitation systems and industrial, agricultural and land-use projects that affect water quality and quantity. Women should have access to clean, affordable water for their human and economic needs. A prerequisite is the assurance of universal access to safe drinking water and to sanitation, and to that end, cooperation at both the national and international levels should be encouraged.

11. Governments should combat the illegal export of banned and hazardous chemicals, including agro-chemicals, in accordance with relevant international and regional agreements. Governments should support the negotiation of a legally binding international instrument for the application of prior informed consent procedures for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides in international trade.

12. Governments, the international community and international organizations should ensure a participatory approach to environmental protection and conservation at all levels and, in elaborating policies and programmes, should recognize that sustainable development is a shared responsibility of men and women and should take into account both men's and women's productive and reproductive roles.

13. All Governments should implement their commitments made in Agenda 21 and the Beijing Platform for Action, including those in the area of financial and technical assistance and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to

the developing countries, and should ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed into all such assistance and transfers.

14. The international community and United Nations agencies should continue to assist developing countries in developing the capacity to carry out gender impact assessments and in devising analytical tools and gender-sensitive guidelines. A gender perspective should be mainstreamed into all environmental impact assessments. Governments, the private sector and international financial institutions should accelerate efforts to carry out gender impact assessments of investment decisions.

15. Governments, civil society, United Nations agencies and bodies, and other international organizations should collect, analyse and disseminate data disaggregated by sex and information related to women and the environment so as to ensure the integration of gender considerations into the development and implementation of sustainable development policies and programmes.

16. Actors such as the United Nations, international financial institutions, Governments and civil society should apply a gender perspective in all funding programmes for sustainable development, while acknowledging the importance of continuing programming targeted at women. Funds should be shared across sectors.

17. Multilateral and bilateral donors, Governments and the private sector should increase support to non-governmental organizations, particularly to women's organizations, in playing an active role in advocacy for the implementation of Agenda 21 at the international and national levels, particularly in supporting national policies and programmes for sustainable development in the developing countries.

18. Such assistance should also be rendered to the countries with economies in transition at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

19. Governments, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations, including women's organizations, should work in collaboration to provide information on sound environmental practices, support gender-sensitive education and develop specific gender-sensitive training programmes in this area.

20. All relevant actors should be encouraged to work in partnership with adolescent girls and boys, utilizing both formal and non-formal educational training activities, inter alia, through sustainable consumption patterns and responsible use of natural resources.

21. Political parties should be encouraged to incorporate environmental goals with a gender dimension into their party platforms.

22. Governments, in partnership with the private sector and other actors of civil society, should strive to eradicate poverty, especially the feminization of poverty, to change production and consumption patterns and to create sound, well-functioning local economies as the basis for sustainable development, inter alia, by empowering the local population, especially women. It is also important for women to be involved in urban planning, the provision of basic

facilities and communication and transport networks, and in policies concerned with safety. International cooperation should be strengthened to achieve this end.

23. Women have an essential role to play in the development sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management. The knowledge and expertise of women, especially of rural women and indigenous women, in the use and the protection of natural resources should be recognized, consolidated, protected and fully used in the design and implementation of policies and programmes for the management of the environment.

24. Laws should be designed and revised to ensure that women have equal access to and control over land, unmediated by male relatives, in order to end land rights discrimination. Women should be accorded secure use rights and should be fully represented in the decision-making bodies that allocate land and other forms of property, credit, information and new technologies. In the process of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, women should be accorded full and equal rights to own land and other properties, inter alia, through inheritance. Land reform programmes should begin by acknowledging the equality of women's rights to land and take other measures to increase land availability to poor women and men.

25. Governments should promote the development of ecological tourism initiatives in order to promote and facilitate women's entrepreneurial activities in this field.

26. Education and training of young people on the human rights of women should be assured and traditional and customary practices that are harmful to and discriminate against women should be eliminated.

27. Governments, research institutions and the private sector should support the role of women in developing environmentally sound technologies, such as solar energy, and in influencing the development of new and appropriate technologies by ensuring education and training in science and technology.

28. Governments, the private sector and the international community are called upon to give priority attention to the links between security, armed conflict and the environment, and their impact on the civilian population, in particular women and children.

29. Recognizing that gender equality is essential to the achievement of sustainable development, the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women should bring the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on women and the environment to the attention of the Chairperson of the Commission on Sustainable Development at its fifth session and of the General Assembly at its special session to review the implementation of Agenda 21.

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PREPARATIONS FOR THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF AN OVERALL REVIEW AND APPRAISAL OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AGENDA 21

Letter dated 21 April 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Belarus addressed to the Secretary-General

On the instructions of my Government, I have the honour to forward herewith the Final Document of the International Conference on Sustainable Development of Countries with Economies in Transition,* which took place in Minsk from 16 to 18 April 1997.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this Final Document circulated as an official document of the fifth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development under agenda item 4.

(Signed) Alyaksandr SYCHOU
Ambassador
Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Belarus
to the United Nations

* The attachment is circulated in the language of submission.

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FINAL DOCUMENT
of the International Conference on Sustainable Development of Countries with Economies in Transition (16-18 April 1997, Minsk, Belarus)

1. The International Conference on Sustainable Development of Countries with Economies in Transition was held in Minsk from 16 to 18 April 1997 with participation of Ministers of the Environment and Economy of countries with economies in transition, representatives and leaders of UN Secretariat, UNDP, UN/ECE, UNEP, WHO, IAEA, UNIDO, OECD, OSCE, CIS Secretariat and CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, other international organisations, NGOs, institutions. The Conference aimed at evaluating the progress made in the field of implementing sustainable development principles in countries with economies in transition, identifying the major priorities and problems in this regard.

2. The Organization of the United Nations has repeatedly reaffirmed the importance of regional and national efforts and initiatives for achieving sustainable development. The International Conference on Sustainable Development of Countries with Economies in Transition held in the Republic of Belarus is such an initiative, important contribution to preparing the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21.

3. The participants of the Conference have evaluated the progress made in the field of applying the principles of sustainable development in countries with economies in transition, identified major problems and weak points in this realm. The participants of the Conference have taken into consideration information on the activities and plans of the United Nations Organisation and its agencies to promote sustainable development in countries with economies in transition.

4. The participants of the Conference consider the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, that on the threshold of the 21st century 'the humanity stands at a defining moment in history', to be of particular relevance to countries with economies in transition. The burden of problems inherited from the past and peculiarities

of the transition period predetermine the complexity and depth of transformations needed.

5. Notwithstanding the numerous difficulties our countries are facing today a consecutive transition to sustainable development should be brought about to resolve socio-economic problems, protect the environment and satisfy the needs of present generations and ones to come pursuant to the provisions of Agenda 21. Efforts in this direction would contribute to reaching another goal, i.e. the integration of countries with economies in transition into the world economy.

6. The transition to sustainable development demands co-ordinated efforts of all countries and a re-orientation of social, economic and environmental institutions. A changing nature of State's participation in economic activities establishes prerequisites for private initiatives. In so doing, the responsibility of a State as a guarantor of environmental protection and environmental safety remains high.

7. Democratization of public life helps citizens and non-governmental organizations play a larger role in environmental decision-making.

8. In time the very notion of sustainable development will be evolving and becoming more specific, its principles should be therefore implemented step by step. At the stage of ongoing economic reforms and strengthening market principles it is of utmost importance to integrate environmental, economic and social policies, to lay down the foundations for sustainable structures of production and consumption, and for ecologically grounded economic policy and management using sustainable development indicators.

9. Market mechanisms and application of the polluter-pays and user-pays principles combined with State regulation are to develop economic incentives to foster a caring attitude towards natural resources and the environment.

10. Efforts should be continued to set up national mechanisms for the transition to sustainable development, paying particular attention to the sectoral problems of Agenda 21. Principles and priorities of sustainable

development should be taken into account when preparing socio-economic forecasts and programmes.

11. The participants of the Conference are convinced that the aspiration of countries with economies in transition to get integrated into the world economy must be underpinned by international measures to assist these countries in their transition to sustainable development. The participants of the Conference appeal to donor States and international financial institutions to earmark adequate resources for strengthening the national capacities of countries with economies in transition and for facilitating their access to environmentally sound technologies.

12. Understanding that inadequate implementation by a country or a group of countries of international environmental commitments brings to naught the efforts of other members of the world community, the participants of the Conference have declared their readiness to participate actively in implementing global and regional environmental conventions and call for more substantial assistance to countries with economies in transition to extend their participation and promote their observance of the aforementioned conventions.

13. The participants of the Conference draw attention to a need for stirring up international efforts under way to resolve the Chernobyl problem, rehabilitate the Aral region, prevent consequences of floods of the Caspian Sea, restore an ecological equilibrium of transboundary water courses and big reservoirs (Lake Sevang, Lake Sarezskoe, Lake Baikal, Lake Issyk Kul), mitigate consequences of other major environmental disasters and protect most ecologically vulnerable zones and regions in countries with economies in transition. We are convinced of the need to consolidate international efforts in this sphere.

14. The participants of the Conference emphasize the importance of strengthening the activities of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development and concentrating its efforts on key issues of sustainable development of global significance. At the same time, the participants of the Conference call for a further regionalization of the United Nations activities for the implementation of Agenda 21, which would allow more attention to be paid to the specific problems of

individual regions, including those of countries with economies in transition.

15. Interaction priorities of countries with economies in transition in the sphere of ensuring sustainable development consist in the following:

- organization of international partnership to resolve problems of the transition to sustainable development;

- active participation in international scientific programmes on this problem

- development of legal acts ensuring that the legislative basis for sustainable development is being formed

16. The participants of the Conference reckon it as useful to:

- Use the development of the 'Environment for Europe' process for the implementation of Agenda 21 in countries with economies in transition, paying particular attention to such issues as energy saving, transport and the environment, economic tools for environmental policies.
- Take an active part in preparing the Fourth Ministerial Conference 'Environment for Europe' (Aarhus, Denmark, 1998) and the Third European Interministerial Conference on Environment and Health (London, 1999) as important stages in introducing the concept of sustainable development in countries with economies in transition.
- Request the UN/ECE to prepare periodic reviews of the progress made by its member countries in achieving sustainable development, organize a series of workshops to exchange experience in preparing national sustainable development strategies, and initiate the development of guidelines for the integration of environmental policy and economic and sectoral ones in countries with economies in transition.
- Invite UNDP, UNEP and other UN bodies and agencies and international organizations to make a contribution within their powers to the implementation of the provisions of the Conference final document.
- Consider the possibility of organizing in some appropriate time a follow-up conference on sustainable development of countries with economies in transition.

- Improve environmental information and education systems and set up national legal systems ensuring access to environmental information and public participation in environmental decision-making, and support in this respect efforts being undertaken by governments of ECE member countries to draft a convention on this question.

17. The participants of the Conference request the Conference Chairman to report this final document at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly for the review of the implementation of Agenda 21 (June 1997) and transmit it to the leaders of countries with economies in transition as well as international organizations concerned.